

LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Item Summary

MEETING DATE: **June 11, 2002**

AGENDA ITEM NO.: **13**

CONSENT: **X**

REGULAR:

CLOSED SESSION:

ACTION: **X**

INFORMATION:

(Confidential)

ITEM TITLE: **Formation of a Family Violence Fatality Review Team for the City of Lynchburg**

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt resolution authorizing the formation of a Family Violence Fatality Review Team for the City of Lynchburg

SUMMARY:

In response to the growing number of family violence fatalities (four of which occurred in the City during 2001), and under the authority of Virginia Code Section 32.1-283.3, the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, along with representatives from the public health and safety sector, have come together to form a multi-agency, multi-professional Family Violence Fatality Review Team for the City of Lynchburg. The formation of a Family Violence Fatality Review Team allows for a closer examination of instances of fatal family violence on an interagency level, creating a body of information, which can be shared, analyzed, and disseminated among participating members to promote a pro-active response to the problem of family violence in Lynchburg. Membership on the team includes representatives from the following organizations: Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, Adult Community Corrections Program, Community Corrections and Pre-trial Services, Forensic Nurse Examiner's Department—Lynchburg General Hospital, Lynchburg Police Department, City Attorney's Office, Court Services Unit—24th Judicial District, YWCA Domestic Violence Prevention Center, and Department of Social Services.

PRIOR ACTION(S): None

FISCAL IMPACT: N/A

CONTACT(S):

William G. Petty, Commonwealth's Attorney	847-1593, ext. 225
Teresa A. Polinske, Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney	847-1593, ext. 242

ATTACHMENT(S):

- Resolution
- Background Information
- Virginia Code Section 32.1-283.3
- Interagency Participation Agreement

REVIEWED BY:

Resolution

WHEREAS Section 32.1-283.3 of the Code of Virginia gives local governments in the Commonwealth of Virginia the authority to establish family violence fatality review teams to examine fatal family violence incidents and to create a body of information to help prevent future family violence fatalities; and;

WHEREAS the City of Lynchburg has experienced family violence fatalities, four of such fatalities having occurred during the 2001 calendar year; and;

WHEREAS, the Lynchburg Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, the Commonwealth's Attorneys Office, the Adult Community Corrections Program, the Lynchburg Community Corrections and Pre-trial Services Program, the Forensic Nurse Examiner's Department at Lynchburg General Hospital, the Lynchburg Police Department, the Court Service Unit for the Twenty-fourth Judicial Circuit, the YWCA Domestic Violence Prevention Center, the Lynchburg Department of Human Services and the City Attorney's Office are vested with the authority to promote and protect the public health and safety and to provide services which improve the well being of individuals and families residing within the City of Lynchburg; and,

WHEREAS, the above-named parties agree that the City of Lynchburg would benefit from the establishment of a multi-agency, multi-professional Family Violence Fatality Review Team, have pledged their support for the creation of a Family Violence Fatality Review Team for the City and have agreed to provide representatives from their respective agencies to serve on the Family Violence Fatality Review Team;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Lynchburg City Council pursuant to the authority given to it by Section 32.1-283.3 of the Code of Virginia does hereby create a Family Violence Fatality Review Team for the City of Lynchburg and the goals of the Team shall be as follows:

1. To enhance awareness among the general public, community leaders, and policy makers of the causes of family violence through the understanding of why individuals batter and why individuals remain in relationships and/or families in which violence occurs.
2. To identify and describe the trends and/or patterns of behavior associated with instances of family violence that have ended in fatalities within the City of Lynchburg.
3. To identify and describe the high-risk factors associated with instances of family violence that have ended in fatalities within the City of Lynchburg.
4. To improve the methods by which data regarding instances of family violence is collected and disseminated by developing systems to share information between agencies and offices that work with victims of family violence.
5. To identify and describe the systemic responses to instances of family violence that have ended in fatalities which created barriers to the safety of individuals involved in family violence situations and that, when removed, will ultimately reduce the number of family violence fatalities.

6. To promote cooperation, communication, and coordination among agencies involved in responding to instances of family violence occurring within the City of Lynchburg by recommending policies, practices, and services that will achieve this end.

7. To initiate local prevention efforts designed to reduce the number of family violence fatalities occurring within the City of Lynchburg as indicated by team findings.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that membership on the Family Violence Fatality Review Team may include, but shall not be limited to, representatives from the Lynchburg Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, the Commonwealth's Attorneys Office, the Adult Community Corrections Program, the Lynchburg Community Corrections and Pre-trial Services Program, the Forensic Nurse Examiner's Department at Lynchburg General Hospital, the Lynchburg Police Department, the Court Service Unit for the Twenty-fourth Judicial Circuit, the YWCA Domestic Violence Prevention Center, the Lynchburg Department of Human Services and the City Attorney's Office.

Adopted:

Certified:

Clerk of Council

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Background Information

In 1997, the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney for the City of Lynchburg received federal funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, enabling the office to establish a Domestic Violence Prosecution Unit (hereinafter referred to as "the Unit"). The Unit's main purpose was, and remains to this day, to hold those accountable who engage in acts of family violence and to ensure that those who are victims of family violence are treated with dignity and compassion throughout the entire criminal justice process. Since its inception, the Unit has prosecuted over 2,500 cases involving instances of family violence.

The Unit has developed a solid working relationship with such local agencies as the Lynchburg Police Department; the Forensic Nurse Examiner's Department at Lynchburg General Hospital; the Lynchburg Department of Social Services; and the local Women's Shelter. Agencies such as these work closely with the Commonwealth's Attorney's office to implement a coordinated community response to instances of domestic violence. While we have come a long way, more must be done.

In 1999, the Virginia General Assembly enacted §32.1-283.3 of the Code of Virginia, which bestows upon localities such as Lynchburg the authority to create family violence fatality review teams as a means to better understand how and why some instances of domestic violence turn deadly. Members of the review team will work together to examine the circumstances preceding the family violence fatality in hopes of achieving the following:

1. A greater understanding of these events;
2. A greater understanding of the policies, procedures, and roles of those who assist victims of family violence;
3. Enhanced interagency cooperation in responding to instances of family violence;
4. System reform.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the Commonwealth of Virginia has created a Family Violence Fatality Review Team Advisory Group that has as its purpose the development of a model protocol for localities to use when creating such teams. In her opening remarks of the model protocol, Marcella F. Fierro, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner for the Commonwealth of Virginia, states, "Virginia is on the forefront as it is the only one of a handful of states that has adopted legislation to support family violence fatality reviews." The Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney for the City of Lynchburg is proud to accept a leadership role in the development of such a team in our community.

There are those who say, "history will teach us nothing". It is the hope of the signatories of the Interagency Partnership Agreement that this is not the case where instances of family violence are concerned. In reviewing the history of our system's response to domestic violence, it is the fatality review team's objective to learn new ways to enhance the level of interagency cooperation, thereby improving the response to family violence such that incidences of fatality are reduced or forever eradicated within our society.